The Asheville Downtown Association periodically surveys its members and the community to get feedback on issues and challenges facing downtown.

The top issues identified by members to maintain the vibrancy of downtown are: more parking/transportation options, supporting local businesses, maintenance of infrastructure, safety, addressing homelessness, and affordable/workforce housing.

**Downtown Issues Questionnaire for Asheville City Council Candidates**

**YOUR NAME:** Kim Roney

**QUESTION:** Please tell us why you are running for City Council.

As a community, we are woven together, and need one other to do our part to Be ‘Bout it Being Better. I’ve been attending City Council and board & commission meetings for over 5 years, distilling information and reporting back to the community because so many people can’t be in the room when decisions are being made about us, without us. I’m engaging in this work with the intention of long-term accountability. I think of our past as I recently visited the home in Kenilworth where my great-grandmother was born, and I think of our future as I consider my piano students I’ve known since they were in elementary school, and who are adults now. Asheville is growing and changing, and I’m inviting neighbors to collaborate in a way that acknowledges the need to take better care of our people and our planet. Asheville is at a critical turning point and needs courageous leaders to address affordability; to value public input at the beginning of decisions around development, childcare, education, and the environment; and to prioritize support of a resilient community from within through our budget, planning, and policies.

**QUESTION:** What do you feel is downtown’s most pressing challenge, and how would you address it?

Parking is regularly a top issue heard from Downtown businesses and residents. In the face of climate change, and addressing our fast-paced growth, we need to ensure true multimodal
access that safely moves people while getting cars off the road. We’re not there yet but we have major public support to move in that direction. We must demand serious improvements in multimodal infrastructure, including but not limited to: complete streets, sidewalks & pedestrian infrastructure that meet NACTO guidelines; ADA accessibility; separated bike lanes; and signal timing that permits crossings while all vehicular traffic is at a complete stop.

Additionally, I propose the Downtown Circulator, which is identified in the Transit Master Plan, be bolstered through collaboration. A trolley-style service like the one in Knoxville would honor our city’s history of having a trolley; could be fully electric with a fast-charging system; would be a solution to getting our visitors out of cars while supporting our Downtown businesses and workers; and would look really beautiful in our city.

**QUESTION:** What smart growth strategies and funding mechanisms would you advocate for to support thoughtful growth in downtown that increases the city's tax base while also maintaining its character?

I support Strong Towns-influenced, dense development along transit corridors that ensures our neighbors and visitors are close to everything they need without having to rely on a car. This will be a benefit to our entire community by ensuring our development doesn’t sprawl into neighborhoods, green spaces, and further into the county. and will be a savings in infrastructure costs while alleviating the traffic and parking issues we have as well as the high environmental costs of focusing on vehicular transportation. We need apartments Downtown that working people of Asheville living within the 30-40% AMI can afford, promoting active transportation and increased quality of life for people who live here. Incentives for locally-owned businesses, especially for those paying a living wage, is one way to grow and maintain the originality of Asheville that currently provides our tax base. Decades of Urban Renewal, red-lining, and gentrification have shuttered or pushed out thriving businesses in our Black community, and that needs to be a consideration when addressing the economic health and sustainability of Asheville. Our Downtown is becoming a playground for the wealthy visitor, but can be so much better as a place where we live, work, and play together.

**ISSUE:** Parking/Transportation

**QUESTION:** What improvements to our parking, transit system and alternative transportation options would you advocate for to ease pressure on the parking system?

As a necessity bus rider, cyclist, and pedestrian, I have first-hand experience with the inadequacies of our multimodal infrastructure. I have used that experience serving on the Multimodal Transportation Commission, Transit Committee, and Downtown Sub-Committee on Parking & Transportation. I know we are capable of prioritizing truly multimodal infrastructure
so our neighbors and visitors are encouraged to participate in getting out of cars. This would be a healthy option more would choose once the network is safe and reliable. Asheville recently dropped from 2nd to 3rd highest bike/pedestrian crash ratio in the state, and that’s not a list we want to rank highly on. A variety of funding streams for our multimodal infrastructure will be needed, a collaboration we are capable of with the resources of City, County, and occupancy taxes as well as grant funding and private-public partnerships.

**ISSUE:** Supporting local business  
**QUESTION:** What strategies would you employ to ensure the sustainability of small locally owned businesses in downtown?

I was deeply saddened by the loss of one of our small-business incubators when our Council permitted lodging use for the historic Flatiron Building. My answer is consistent: Asheville must continue support of local businesses, working with organizations like the Asheville Grown Business Alliance, who have invested in our vibrant, local economy. By supporting policies that value independent businesses instead of major chains and corporations, we can focus on cooperative & employee ownership, as well as businesses owned by minorities and women. The people of Asheville are remarkably dedicated, and need leaders who prioritize living wages, land trusts, energy-efficient business practices, and collaborative efforts to offset the rising cost of running a business in one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the country. This means the language of the Living Asheville Comprehensive Plan come alive in a way that advances equity while updating our outdated UDO to champion a resilient, local economy that doesn’t walk the tight-rope of relying so heavily on tourism.

**ISSUE:** Infrastructure  
**QUESTION:** Identify your top three downtown infrastructure needs. How would you prioritize funding for these projects and how do you feel infrastructure impacts business success?

Be ‘Bout it Being Better means investing in deeply-affordable housing, a Downtown circulator shuttle, and truly multimodal infrastructure that addresses equitable, safe access and gets everyone to their destination safely. These are doable when we remove barriers to participation and invite community engagement in our budget, planning, and policies for every resource in our community. We need to update our UDO and zoning codes while ensuring our occupancy tax dollars address deferred impact on our infrastructure. When we do these things, we will be a more welcoming and inclusive place for our neighbors and visitors!
ISSUE: Safety

QUESTION: How would you work with the police department to ensure adequate resources to maintain public safety? What strategies would you employ to ensure community trust in policing?

First, I want to address that issue we will not have 21st Century Policing in our community until all our first responders can afford to live here, which means going to the same grocery store and sending our children to the same schools. We have a new APD Chief, but need policies that are aligned with our community values to ensure accountability and transparency. Safety for all of Asheville’s people is stated as a shared value in our community, but that means listening to what makes people feel safe, and that’s not happening. We are perpetuating discrimination, harm and trauma, and not all of our neighbors feel safe, especially Downtown, where many feel our visitors are more important than our neighbors. As a pedestrian, I have joined in going on the record at City Hall with a customer service complaint that my neighbors are being harassed with my tax dollars. I’m disappointed our written consent policy doesn’t include pedestrian protections of our rights, which means data is not being proactively recorded while drivers of cars have more protections than those not in a car. Thank you to our local NAACP and members of the Racial Justice Coalition for advocacy over the years to bring equity to the decision making on these matters. I hope Asheville is capable of being a leader among the municipalities in WNC, but that means listening and following-up on the concerns of the people who live and work here.

Second, I feel least safe about loss of income, housing insecurity, not being able to buy groceries since the Earth Fare that was on my way home from the closest bus stop is closing, and especially when crossing busy streets like Patton and Merrimon Avenues. I welcome neighbors to join in addressing root causes of poverty and equitable access in our community so everyone can move safely.

ISSUE: Homelessness

QUESTION: What steps would you take to support the Homeless Initiative Advisory Committee and Asheville’s homeless resource providers? What other strategies or initiatives would you consider to address homelessness in our community?

We need to support community-led efforts to address homelessness and root causes of poverty. Working with partners to amplify creative and cooperative solutions looks like: ensuring our incentivized affordable housing is required to accept vouchers; amplifying programs like the Tiny Home Village and Street Medic Team of BeLoved Asheville; supporting zoning that makes it possible for our faith communities to participate in solutions; getting behind housing solutions that are equity-building and deeply-affordable; welcoming solutions by and for our unhoused and vulnerable youth; and ensuring human dignity through access to public bathrooms and potable water for our neighbors and visitors.

ISSUE: Affordable/Workforce Housing
QUESTION: What is your position on housing diversity in downtown? What other strategies would you like to see our city develop to address the affordability issue?

Any further comments you’d like to include concerning Downtown Asheville?

Our issues around the racial opportunity gap in our schools in an issue for economic mobility and stability, a key tenant necessary for a Green New Deal for Asheville and an important part of both retaining and growing our local, living wage economy. It’s not enough to talk about equity and inclusion, we have to center those most affected, and it’s work I’m hoping more neighbors will join me in making time for. Let’s join our neighbors doing work with our students and families to champion community-led solutions so we can heal each other and our community while progressing as a more resilient community!